

ALTHOUGH Wycombe Wanderers will doubtless be £2,000 or so better off after Saturday's F.A. Cup tie against Reading, it comes as no surprise that there is a feeling of disappointment after their 2-1 defeat at Loakes Park (writes Stuart Earp).

Many feel, myself included, that Wycombe should have earned themselves a replay at Elm Park on Wednesday after pulling back from a 2-0 half time deficit. Only a brilliant save by Steve Death deprived them of that in the dying seconds of the game.

But I feel the question must be asked — should the game have been played at all? For such an important game as this, I would have thought it would have been fairer to have delayed the game until Tuesday when, as it now transpires, the conditions would have been far better suited to constructive football.

Obviously this would have meant a good deal of re-organisation from the club's point of view and possibly a smaller attendance. But consider what the prize might

have been if Wycombe had been successful.

On Saturday's showing there seems little doubt Wanderers would have given a better account of themselves. Reading looked only mediocre for much of the game and, Robin Friday apart, had few players to seriously trouble the Blues. The way they were pressurised into errors during the last 15 minutes suggests they would have found it extremely difficult to cope.

ADVANTAGE

Reading manager Charlie Hurley made it known he did not want to play on the frozen surface but after consultation with both clubs, referee John Homewood agreed to stage the game. If anything, I suppose it was some advantage to the Blues who had played in similar

conditions the Saturday before against Southall.

Even so, I can't help feeling that everyone would have benefited from a re-arranged game on the following Tuesday when the ground had thawed. At the time, of course, there was no guarantee that conditions would have improved.

In the end Wanderers must know you can't afford to allow professionals a two goal start and expect to get away with it. Reading now visit Hereford United in the third round and they can hardly be relishing the long trip to their fellow Third Division club.

One casualty from Saturday's game was Dylan Evans. He broke a bone in his hand when going up for a high ball and is almost certain to miss tomorrow's (Saturday) visit of Leytonstone to Loakes

Park in the Rothmans Isthmian League.

Dylan went for an X-ray after the game which revealed a break and his arm is now in plaster up to the elbow. Howard Kettleborough, cup tied last week, is the obvious replacement up front.

John Priestley is down with 'flu at the moment but hopes to be fit while another midfielder player, Mick Holfield, is suffering with a leg injury. If Priestley is fit it seems likely he will revert to his midfield role after playing up front against Reading. This would leave the way clear to recall Tony Horseman, a surprise omission from the team on Saturday. 'Bodger' stood down when Gavin Fraser was brought into the team but the youngster will probably be back at college who have first call on his services.

Leytonstone recently parted company with their manager Ted Hardy after a disagreement within the club. Hardy was the man who saved the London club from relegation to Division Two last season while this term he has taken them to a position near the top of the table.

No successor has been named as yet and former player Tony Mackie and Reg Groves have since taken over. The Stones' 2-0 defeat at Leyton-Wingate in the London Senior Cup on Tuesday could be a reaction to Hardy's dismissal but there are enough established players in the side to suggest Wycombe will have their work cut out tomorrow.

Many of the players joined Hardy last season, amongst them the current skipper John Still. He has teamed up again with former Bishop Stortford colleague Martin Smith while the capture of Ron Howell from Tooting has been responsible for much of the club's early success. Howell was a leading light in Tooting's fine cup run last season.

Tony Bass, their giant centre forward, has recently returned after a knee operation but leading goalscorer this season is Steve King. He has 18 to his credit so far.

DAGENHAM TOP

The league title has always been Wycombe's priority despite their success in the F.A. Cup in recent seasons. The Blues lost the leadership to Dagenham last week but if they find some degree of consistency they must be in with a chance of the championship.

Division One looks to be more open than ever before with half a dozen clubs bidding for honours.

Next match for the Blues is again at home, this time against Croydon on the Tuesday after Christmas, December 28. Kick off is 3 p.m.

Tomorrow evening, Wycombe Wanderers Supporters Club are staging a special Testimonial Disco when the proceeds from their raffle, in the region of £300, will be presented to John Maskell and Tony Horseman.

Blues v. United again

WYCOMBE Wanderers, who were involved in a number of incidents during and after their Berks and Bucks Senior Cup semi-final at Chesham last term, must visit United again on January 22 in the quarter-final of this season's competition.

The game itself at the Meadow was one that will be remembered for years. Wycombe scored via a Pete Johnson own goal after only five seconds, were 4-0 up in just over a quarter of an hour and eventually clinched a 4-2 victory.

But the main incident was to come after the game when it was discovered Wycombe had unwittingly fielded an ineligible player in Graham Mackenzie. Wanderers withdrew from the competition.



This picture of part of the Loakes Park pitch shows just what the players had to contend with on Saturday. Here Mick Holfield takes the ball up the wing